

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, March 4, 2008

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

CALISTA SPRINGER, 1991-2008 Funeral bringstown together Pastor talks of finding light in a time of darkness

Tuesday, March 04, 2008

BY JEFF BARR

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388-8581

CENTREVILLE

It was a drizzly day nearly devoid of color, with gray skies and haze the backdrop for a village saying a sad goodbye.

The memorial service Monday for 16-year-old Calista Springer, who died last week in a house fire while chained to her bed, was a private affair for friends and family. But more than 120 visitors filled the 14 pews at Centreville Baptist Church while others sat in folding chairs in the overflow section in the back.

Main Street also was gray, with the exception of telephone poles decorated with yellow ribbons. Customers were scarce at The Verdict restaurant and Roundup Bar & Grill. Business was just as slow at Truckenmiller Hardware and The Hair Depot.

No more than five cars were parked on Main Street at 11 a.m., but a parking spot couldn't be found within two blocks of the church.

The old-fashioned sanctuary sits on the corner of Burr Oak and Dean streets, not more than 75 yards diagonally from the charred remains of the Springer family's former home. The smell of smoke hung powerfully there Monday morning, an unwelcome reminder that wafted its way through the drizzle to the church's doorstep.

"It's been a week of darkness," said the Rev. David Peterson, speaking from the pulpit near a small picture of Calista and a smattering of flower arrangements.

Tied to one of the flowers was a bundle of green, blue, orange and purple balloons.

"When everything else seems dark, there is light to be found," Peterson said. "Just when you think there is no color left, it shows itself."

Calista's father, Anthony Springer, sat alongside other immediate family members in the church's front row. Her father has said the girl loved to draw, to paint, to create in color.

"Calista died in darkness following a life that was not without its struggles," Peterson said. "Like everyone's life, there were joys -- her art, her memorable giggle. And like everyone's life, there were struggles."

Peterson spoke of unanswered questions, and of the search for answers.

"'Why?' is the most-asked question at a time like this," he said. "But, as time passes, the questions that are just as important are the 'how?' questions."

"How do we move forward, how do we get through this, how do we find light in a time that seems so dark?"

The burned frame of a house seemed to offer the beginnings of answers to some of those questions.

A wooden wishing-well was stationed in the front yard, close to the colorful makeshift memorial constructed by town residents. Vines gone brown for winter wove through the wrought-iron fence alongside a stream of yellow police tape.

Barely noticeable, hanging from an upstairs window facing the church, was a piece of green and red quilt. Partially burned, it provided a patch of color on a drab canvas.

“A little color during bleak times can be enough to help us carry on,” Peterson said. “Sometimes a little light is all we need to show us the way.”

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Two probes reviewing state's actions with teen

Tuesday, March 04, 2008

BY SARITA CHOUREY

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LANSING -- The state agency that serves as a watchdog over Michigan's child-welfare system has launched an investigation into the Department of Human Services' interactions with Calista Springer, the 16-year-old Centreville girl who died last week while chained to her bed.

Calista's father, Anthony Springer, acknowledged last week that his family had four to five prior contacts with Children's Protective Services, a division of the Department of Human Services, she said.

Springer noted that his children -- Calista and her two younger sisters -- were never taken from his home.

Calista was discovered chained to her bed after a fire in her home last week. Her parents have told police that Calista often wandered out of the house at night and they used a dog chain to keep her in bed after a fabric tether system broke. The Michigan State Police are investigating.

The death of a child who had prior contact with the state typically triggers an investigation by the state's Ombudsman's office, said Stacie Bladen, an investigator with the agency.

"We investigate every child death that occurs as the result of abuse or neglect, even if it's suspected" abuse, Bladen said. "It's just to verify or determine whether or not the (Human Services) agency complied with law and policy handling the case prior to death."

Also Monday, the human services department said it has initiated its own internal investigation.

"Any time a child dies and the department has been involved with the family, we review every action and decision made by the department, and we look at our overall practices to see if any changes need to be made to better protect children," spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said. "We all want to better understand how this tragedy occurred."

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Court records show turbulent family history

Tuesday, March 04, 2008

BY REX HALL JR.

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CENTREVILLE -- Anthony Springer was prone to fits of rage and violence, often throwing objects and punching walls and doors, according to a court document filed by his wife in 1999 seeking a personal-protection order.

Marsha Springer, then 29, told a St. Joseph County judge in a four-page letter that her husband threatened her at times and often took out his anger on their three young daughters.

"Tony never has a kind word to say to the girls and has never told them that he loves them," Marsha wrote in the letter attached to her request for the protection order. "It's just constant yelling to shut up, get out of my way and get out of my sight."

The oldest of the daughters was Calista Springer, who was 16 when she died in a house fire last week while chained to her bed. Her funeral was Monday. Police have said they believe the fire was an accident but they are continuing to investigate, including the circumstances that led the Springers to confine Calista to her bed at night.

Judge Thomas Shumaker granted Marsha Springer the protection order on June 28, 1999, the day she filed her request. Shumaker terminated the order two months later at Marsha Springer's request.

Anthony Springer, reached by phone Monday night, declined to comment and referred questions to his attorney, Michael Mestelle, of Sturgis.

"I've been advised by our lawyers not to say anything to anybody," Springer said. "That's all I can say."

Mestelle could not be reached for comment.

The documents are the most recent public records the St. Joseph County Clerk's Office has on file related to Anthony Springer or his family.

A separate case, initiated in January 1997, shows that Calista's biological mother, Norma Swegles, sought custody although she had not been involved in the girl's life since Calista was an infant. Swegles alleged that Calista was malnourished and had been abused.

In a countersuit filed a month later, Anthony Springer denied the allegations and sought to have Swegles' parental rights terminated. In May 1997, Shumaker ruled in Anthony Springer's favor and legally placed Calista as an adoptee in the home of Anthony and Marsha Springer.

A third court case on file in St. Joseph County shows that Anthony Springer pleaded guilty to attempted embezzlement of \$3,049 from a Three Rivers gas station where he worked in 1996. He was sentenced to three months in the county jail.

In her request for a protection order filed nearly nine years ago, Marsha Springer described a dreary home life dominated by an "atmosphere of anger and rage." She depicted Anthony Springer as a self-possessed husband and father who bounced from job to job and spent what little money the family had on his

collections of model airplanes and Civil War memorabilia.

Marsha Springer wrote in her attached letter that her husband suffered from bipolar disorder, attention-deficit disorder and "severe depression." She said Anthony Springer rarely took his Prozac and Ritalin prescriptions and "doesn't see any need for counseling for himself or our marriage."

On the standardized protection order, Marsha Springer checked a box asking the judge to prevent Anthony Springer from "threatening to kill or physically injure" her or their three daughters.

In the attached letter, Marsha Springer wrote, "My children and I need help getting out of this vicious cycle ... It is only a matter of time before the children and myself become the physical targets in these rages. The fact that I am blind, having very limited sight in one eye I feel without a protection order in place Tony will do great bodily harm to me or my children."

Marsha Springer described instances where her husband put his hand through a plate-glass window in 1997 and in 1998 when he ripped a phone from a wall after an argument over the placement of a Christmas tree in their house.

Marsha Springer also alleged Anthony Springer forced her to have sex with him when she refused. She wrote that he told her if she ever tried to leave him, "one of us would have to die."

In another section of the letter, Marsha Springer wrote that her husband collected roadkill, boiled the meat off the bones and reconstructed the animals' skeletons.

"This is not just a hobby, this has become an obsession with him," she wrote. "You can't have a conversation with him unless it has to do with this subject."

In seeking to terminate the protection order, Marsha Springer wrote: "There has been no problems. We are seeking counseling. The counselor feels that with the children we both need to be involved."

Shumaker granted that request on Aug. 20, 1999.

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Police investigating infant's death

Tuesday, March 04, 2008

By **Danielle Quisenberry**

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Jackson police are investigating the death of a 10-month-old boy found Monday morning in his crib, but say it appears to have been accidental.

Police were called about 10 a.m. to an apartment in the 400 block of W. Michigan Avenue, where one of the boy's parents found him unresponsive, said Jackson Police Lt. Aaron Kantor.

"At this point in the investigation, the death appears to be accidental," Kantor said.

The boy had no visible injuries, he said. An autopsy was scheduled for Monday afternoon, but results were not yet available.

Kantor said officers interviewed the boy's 22-year-old mother and 26-year-old father, who live in the apartment, and processed the scene for evidence.

The investigation has shown the child was put to bed Sunday and found dead in the morning, Kantor said.

It is standard procedure to investigate an infant's death, Kantor said.

Police did not release the infant's name or those of his parents.

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Article published Mar 2, 2008

Murderer gets another life term for molesting kids

By Alex Lundberg
OBSERVER STAFF WRITER

The man who contended that his undercover work for the Detroit police department excused his molesting of children got a life sentence and more when he found out that the judge in his sex abuse case didn't agree.

Richard Lawson, 62, was sentenced to life in prison on one count of first-degree child molestation and 30 to 60 years each on three other counts of first-degree child molestation at a sentencing hearing Thursday in Circuit Court Judge Annette Berry's courtroom. Lawson will serve the terms concurrently.

According to Livonia Detective Cory Williams, the judge called Lawson evil and believed he enjoyed telling the jury about what he had done.

The new sentences are academic, since he is already serving a life sentence for the 1989 murder of Livonia businessman Exavor Giller. It was during the investigation into that crime that police say Lawson started giving hints that he knew something about the case of the Oakland County child killer.

Williams said the admission led him and other officers to talk to Lawson's former associates and learned that some of them were his victims when they were children. They talked to people in four states as well as here in Michigan. No further information about the Oakland County child killer was revealed, but the case against Lawson was cemented.

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Michigan Report

March 3, 2008

CHILD CARE ACCREDITATION BILLS **ROLLED OUT**

Public and private child placing agencies, child caring institutions or out-of-state facilities would have to be accredited by 2011 under legislation recently introduced in the House.

The effort is being spearheaded by [Rep. Dudley Spade](#) (D-Franklin Twp.), chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services. He, along with [Rep. Pam Byrnes](#) (D-Chelsea), introduced [HB 5836](#) and [HB 5837](#) last week.

The legislation pulls any state funding for a public ward placed in a facility that has not been accredited by either the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals, The Council on Accreditation or the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities.

Mr. Spade said the measure is aimed at improving the state's foster care, adoption and juvenile justice services. Currently, four states, including Illinois, require full accreditation and seven other states are examining it as well. With the state facing a lawsuit on its handling of child cases, Mr. Spade the legislation is an effort to get a "higher standard for service delivery, for management (and) for oversight."

Michigan ranks second in the nation for the number of private agencies that are accredited. Nearly 70 percent of approximately 90 private agencies in the state are accredited, Mr. Spade said, though he added that some groups have different statistics on the issue. However, none of the public facilities, including the Department of Human Services, is accredited.

Mr. Spade some he knows that some opponents will discredit accreditation programs as lacking value, but he said the measure is needed and the legislation provides sufficient time for agencies to go through the process. The legislation has been referred to the House Oversight and Investigations Committee, but Mr. Spade said he has yet to talk with Chair House [Majority Floor Leader Steve Tobocman](#) (D-Detroit) on taking up the bills.

Maureen Sorbet, spokesperson for DHS, said they hadn't reviewed the bills' language yet and so could not comment any further. Gongwer News Service was unable to reach officials from childcare organizations or the union representing DHS workers for comment on the bills.



ABC Academy to host child-care conference

Tuesday, March 04, 2008

By Tarryl Jackson

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Child-care providers in the Jackson area will have a chance Saturday to learn more about early childhood issues and clock in training hours required by the state Department of Human Services.

ABC Academy -- which provides preschool and child-care services at three Jackson centers -- is hosting its second annual Jackson Area Early Childhood Conference at Baker College.

The training requirements for all child-care providers and day-care centers in Michigan were new in December 2006.

"It definitely improves the quality of the care that children receive," said Ginelle Skinner, administrative director of ABC Academy. "There's a lot of training that is needed. I think it was a long time coming."

Child-care centers must require 12 hours of annual training for all care-giving staff, according to DHS' Web site, www.michigan.gov/dhs.

Training topics must include child development and discipline, curriculum, health, working with parents and licensing rules.

ABC Academy received a \$5,000 grant from the Jackson County Community Foundation to help run the conference. The foundation is involved in the statewide Great Start program, which stresses the importance of early childhood education, said Jan Maino, vice president of programs for the Jackson County Community Foundation.

Giving the keynote presentation is Julie Austin, a musician and early childhood specialist from Scottdale, Ga. She will play a variety of instruments and give teachers ideas for musical activities.

Kim Kloack, a pre-kindergarten teacher at the Jackson Child Care Center at 201 S. Jackson St., will give a workshop on physical activity and how to work it into a daily routine for children.

"We're trying to promote (physical activity) early in our kids," she said.

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Fight for services for this area's teens

The following is the [Jackson Citizen Patriot's](#) editorial for March 4:

Measured in the lives it has changed, the Florence Crittenton Home has been one of Jackson's most meaningful institutions for the last century. Troubled young women were loved and taught hard lessons as they delivered babies — and often gave them up — while living at 1603 Lansing Ave.

Issue

Florence Crittenton Services' home for teen mothers shuts down.

Our Say

It's a loss. What's more important, however, is continuing its other programs for local teens.

The home's shutdown less than two weeks ago was sudden and jarring. Not just because the home's 14 girls and 13 babies had to leave, but because of the dramatic break with the past.

Still, as the community moves forward, what's most significant is preserving Florence Crittenton programs that serve Jackson County youths directly. The residential program housed no Jackson County teens when it closed.

Initially, it appears the home's stakeholders will work to continue programs that matter most to this community. They should. Those programs are needed.

Let's underline some distinctions. Florence Crittenton Services operated the residential home. It also runs outreach programs that help teen mothers, those who are pregnant and those ordered by a judge to get assistance. Fourteen girls lived at the home; the service says it helped more than 500 through community programs last year.

The home may have been Crittenton's flagship, but it appears to be a small part of the agency's work (in numbers, though not intensity). The state Department of Human Services may have helped create the financial crisis by stalling on payments, but its decision to stop sending teen moms to the

home makes sense. Florence Crittenton has had trouble making payroll, and fell behind on federal payroll taxes.

With the residential program gone, Florence Crittenton officials seem to be focusing on the positive impact they can make. They plan to sell their building at 521 Wildwood Ave. and consolidate programs on Lansing Avenue.

Director Bob Powell called the closing a "tragedy," but vowed all other programs will continue. That's what this community needs to hear. Why?

When it comes to teen pregnancy, Jackson's problem isn't that there are too few places for teen moms to go. Unlike in the 1920s or '30s, young mothers more easily escape stigma for having children. They can stay in school and often receive help from their families.

The real problem is that too many young women become pregnant in the first place. They need an agency like Florence Crittenton to provide outreach programs that give them parenting help. Or they need help avoiding the pitfalls that could land them in lifelong trouble.

As we move forward, Florence Crittenton's leaders should put more emphasis on openness, explaining their situation to the public that has supported them for decades through donations and sweat equity. Agency leaders should not be shutting out the partner they once embraced.

Florence Crittenton deserves this community's thanks for helping young people for generations. However, the approach that was needed in 1919 does not fit in 2008. A residential home might not be part of its mission, but there's much more this agency still can do.

Cadillac News

March 4, 2008

Food pantry supplies down

When visiting the Cadillac Revival Center Community Food Pantry, many customers has noticed recently that the number of food items and supplies has been on the low side lately.

Not only are shoppers at food pantries noticing this trend, but so are the agencies that supply the food. Laura Porterkeller, branch manager of Northwest Gleaners Food Bank, said although donations from major companies have stayed the same, individual donations have been dwindling.

"We are getting a good stock of items from major companies, but locally, donations have gone down a bit," Porterkeller said.

Another issue she has noticed is with more staples such as rice and beans being donated, people don't know what to do with the products. Porterkeller is trying to change that mind-set.

"Everything we get is donated, so we can't be picky. We take what is donated," she said. "Folks have to start being creative in using stuff and we are trying to teach them to be broader in their thinking. If they need to know how to make beans from scratch, we want to teach them."

Northwest Gleaners Food Bank in Cadillac has about 200,000 pounds at any give time and gave away more than 1.6 million pounds of food last year in the 10-county area.

The goal of Gleaners, a part of America's Second Harvest, is to take in donated food and then donate it to local food pantries or other agencies. From there, the food is given to those in need.

For every dollar donated to America's Second Harvest, it helps provide 20 pounds of food and grocery products to men, women and children facing hunger in the country.

Any donations to Gleaners in Cadillac will stay in the area. Anyone interested in making a donation can call the food bank at 779-0056.

Several local churches and non-profit agencies also have food pantries or hold soup kitchens. Laura Porterkeller can either put a donor in contact with a local group or suggest a pantry that is struggling.

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Published: March 04, 2008 09:26 am

More than food is needed at pantries

BY HARRY GILLEN
Capital News Service

LANSING -- Food bank systems across western Michigan have seen an increase of 30 to 35 percent in donations over last year, but food pantry beneficiaries usually lack other essentials like personal care products.

"When a person is in need, they're really in need of everything to run a household," said Teresa Pawl-Knapp, assistant director at Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan Inc. in Grand Rapids.

"If you think about it, personal care products are high-priced items," she said. "When you're struggling to pay heat and electric bills, you definitely want personal care products, as well."

Kathy Walter, food pantry coordinator for Immaculate Conception Church in Traverse City, said her pantry has seen a 10 percent increase in donations from last year, but is still struggling to provide personal care products.

"Food stamps don't cover products like toothbrushes, deodorant, toilet paper or dish soap. They only go for food," Walter said. "People who haven't experienced that side of life don't always realize that."

Walter said the shelves in her pantry are still "pretty empty" due to the high need and the high cost of gas and utilities.

"People can't afford groceries. They need gas in their car if they need to get back to work," Walter said. "People will do that before they buy food. Or they'll pay a utility bill, and get to the point where they have no more money to pay for food."

The greater demand for food banks is not limited to western Michigan, said William Long, executive director of the Food Bank Council in Lansing.

"We're seeing the impact statewide," Long said. "The thing that is challenging in food bank networks in rural areas is the cost of transportation. If the round trip is 70 or 80 miles instead of 10, it makes it difficult. It impacts on the ability to access some of the food banking systems."

The Kent County Emergency Needs Task Force in Grand Rapids is addressing the problem by conducting a study funded by Grand Valley State University that will assess the overall distribution of food resources in the state.

"It will determine what we have and what we need to do to do it effectively," said David Schroeder, the consultant manager for the Task Force.

Homeless activists decry 'war against the poor'

Posted by [Kathy Jessup | Kalamazoo Gazette](#)

March 04, 2008 10:00AM

KALAMAZOO -- Kalamazoo's homeless activists and city officials are at loggerheads again over the question of how "public" is the city's Kalamazoo Transportation Center.

Acting Kalamazoo Public Safety Chief James Mallery says calls for his officers to respond to drug overdoses, fights, loitering and panhandling complaints at the downtown bus and train center have quadrupled over the last several years. Last month, public safety officers recovered several deadly weapons and intervened in near-drug overdoses of three people, according to Mallery.

But the Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network told Kalamazoo city commissioners Monday night that street people are the victims of what they called a "war against the poor."

The activists alleged homeless people at the transportation center are being "harassed" by officers asking for their identifications and proof that they are at the center awaiting a bus or train or someone who is scheduled to arrive there.

"Everybody has a right to go down there (to the transportation center) and not be intimidated and harassed and other people have the right not to be pushed around," Commissioner Don Cooney said.

According to city estimates, more than 107,000 people came to Kalamazoo in 2007 through the downtown transit center that's the hub for city buses, commercial bus service and Amtrak riders.

KHAN members brought their protest to Monday's commission session, fresh from a several-hour, sit-down meeting with Mallery over the issue. KHAN claims Kalamazoo's homeless are being "targeted for harassment" when they are questioned and searched at the transportation center.

"KHAN wants the city commission and (Public Safety officers) to recognize the Transportation center as a public space protected as a public accommodation under the Michigan Constitution," homeless advocates said in a prepared statement Monday.

At the same time, KHAN said it supports "actions to stop violence and prevent aggressive panhandling at the transportation center."

City Code says the transit center is "reserved" for train or bus customers, people patronizing on-site businesses and those who are meeting or seeing off travelers. No smoking, weapons or illegal substances are allowed, and "begging, panhandling, littering, defacing property and loitering" also are prohibited.

"A Public Safety officer having reason to believe that any person has violated any of these rules may request that the person" leave the transportation center," the City Code says.

Mallery said his department received 804 calls for service at the KTC in 2007, resulting in 179 police reports. In 2005, there were 198 calls and 37 police reports, according to the acting chief.

That upswing is continuing. During February, Mallery said officers found three people at the KTC who had nearly overdosed on drugs, recovered a loaded gun that had fallen off a person during a fight, and recovered several other sharp, deadly weapons.

According to Mallery, one officer who responded to a call about a fight between several juveniles was "surrounded by 40 or 50 other juveniles."

Mallery said the department has made community policing contacts at local schools and homeless shelters, seeking a "partnership" in addressing the code violations.

KDPS is also studying police practices at Grand Rapids' transportation hub where some officers are specifically assigned to patrol there. Kalamazoo has no officers working solely at its transit center.

"It isn't everyone causing problems. But it's reached a point where we have to address the issue," Mallery said Monday. "We're trying to do the outreach to get the word out that will lead to a peaceful environment for the citizens, businesses and visitors around the transportation center."

Mallery said he's been given "no specific instances" of officers "harassing" the homeless or young people.

"Anyone in this city who feels they're not treated fairly by officers should notify us immediately with the specifics and I pledge it will be investigated," Mallery said. "I have confidence that the men and women serving this city are conducting themselves in a professional manner."